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VIOLENCE AGAINST THE KURDS IN THE TURKISH REPUBLIC

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Introduction

The Kurds' experience with modern mass violence, from civil wars to genocides, is long and complex. Whereas Kurds lived for centuries in pre-national conditions in the Ottoman and Persian Empires, the advent of nationalism and the nation-state system in the Middle East in the twentieth century radically changed the situation. World War I was a watershed for most ethnic groups in the Ottoman Empire, and some political minorities such as Armenians and Assyrians suffered genocide – including at the hands of Kurds. Moreover, the post-Ottoman order precluded the Kurds from building a nation state of their own. Kurds were either relegated to cultural and political subordination under the Turkish and Persian nation states, or to a precarious existence under alternative orders (colonialism in Syria and Iraq, and communism in the Soviet Union). The nation-state system changed the pre-national, Ottoman imperial order with culturally heterogeneous territories into a system of nation states which began to produce nationalist homogenization through various forms of population policies.

In the modern Republic of Turkey, Kurds became victims of policies of genocide and genocidal massacres. After the establishment of the Republic in 1923, the Kemalist government launched violent and invasive 'Turkification' policies, for example, by suppressing the Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925 through genocidal massacres, and the 1938 genocide in Dersim, which went beyond mass murder and included forced cultural assimilation of the Kurds in the region. Counterinsurgency in northern Kurdistan (eastern Turkey) in the 1980s and 1990s brought more violence to those areas, resulting in massacres, environmental destruction, and mass displacement. This chapter examines the Kurds' encounter with modern mass political violence in modern Turkey. It looks into three distinct periods: the single-party period (1923–1945) in which the 1938 Dersim massacre was the worst case of mass violence, the counterinsurgency period (1984–1999) during which over 3,000 villages were destroyed, and the spill-over conflict (2015–2016) when fighting blew over from Syrian Kurdistan. These three distinct eras also represent three different political generations, both on the side of the Turkish state (and that of its Kurdish victims): Kemalism, nationalism, and political Islam, respectively. At the same time, the forms and modalities of violence differed, but there were also remarkable similarities between the three periods.

The Kurdish historical experience from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century is a complex process of ambivalent developments, but is generally characterized by a lack of united statehood and a story of collective life in pre-national conditions between the Ottoman Empire and the Persian Empire. Unlike societies with traditions of state formation reaching back to the early modern period, the Kurds' long-term historical experience does not consist of a sustained process of state-building, as most of Kurdistan was governed from Istanbul as the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Kurdish chieftains (*agha*), religious leaders (*sheikhs*), and chiefs (*emirs*) represented political power at the local level, but the conduct of the Ottoman (and subsequent Turkish and Arab) political elites demonstrated that Kurdistan was mostly the object of state-building and not its subject. The destruction and abrogation of the Kurdish emirates until the 1850s eliminated the possibility for an emerging leadership that could formulate nationalist claims around the end of World War I. A town like Cîzre (Jazira), for example, which had been the cradle of the Botan Emirate in the mid-nineteenth century, had by the late twentieth century been reduced to a weak border town with its elites imprisoned, exiled, or assassinated, and its remaining population disenfranchised and terrorized.[1] Cîzre was not an exception among former Kurdish power centres. As the Ottoman and Persian Empires collapsed in the aftermath of World War I, Kurdistan began to be governed by British and French mandates in Iraq and Syria, respectively, as well as by the Turkish nation state. The establishment of Arab nation states in Iraq and Syria then led to the Kurds being pushed into demographic and political minority positions that averted conflict only through weak structures of power sharing. The advent of the nation-state system in the post-Ottoman lands made the Kurds dependent on Damascus, Ankara, Tehran, and Baghdad. Violence against the Kurds in Turkey was part and parcel of the Turkish nation-building process, one that continues with periodic flare-ups of violence.

The Young Turk era, 1913–1950

In Turkey, a generation of Young Turk social engineers was responsible for fundamentally and violently transforming Ottoman society in the period 1913–1950. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and its successor, the Republican People's Party (RPP), presided over a series of massacres, deportations, and forced assimilation campaigns that amounted to genocide of a number of minorities. Kurds suffered mass violence in this authoritarian and Turkish-nationalist period as well. Three massacres stand out for their genocidal nature: the violence in the Diyarbekir region in 1925, in the Ararat region in 1930, and in the Dersim region in 1938. All of these massacres followed organized Kurdish resistance against Kemalist persecution and repression. In all of these cases, the Turkish counter-insurgency that followed during and after the reconquest of territory was exceptionally brutal, barely distinguishing between Kurds who were involved politically or not. In the Kurdish case, it was especially Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his inner circle of military officers and civilian administrators who were responsible for most of the violence, especially the massacres of 1925, 1930, and 1938. Atatürk himself was thoroughly hostile to Kurdish cultural and political rights and was personally involved, from Ankara or Istanbul, in instigating and directing the violence. He was supported by his loyal right-hand man and veteran social engineer Şükrü Kaya and long-time nationalist bureaucrats Celal Bayar and Mustafa Abdülhalik Renda, as well as his army generals: Mürsel Bakü, Kâzım İnanç, Fevzi Çakmak and Kâzım Orbay. What these elites had in common was the background of being Turkish-speaking Ottoman Muslims who disproportionately originated from the Balkans. Their collective experience of exile, modern education in the top Ottoman academies, absorption of Turkish nationalist ideology, and anxieties of ethnic separatism among Turkey's minorities drove them to uncompromising political positions towards the Kurds.[2]

First and foremost, Kurdish elites were specifically targeted throughout the entire twentieth century, both in terms of general persecution and repression, and especially during episodes of mass violence. There has been a long list of assassinations, executions, imprisonment, and torture of religious, cultural, economic, intellectual, and political leaders in all regions of Kurdistan. In Turkey, the most prominent examples are Sheikh Said (1865–1925) and Seyit Rıza (1863–1937), leaders of the uprisings and resistance in 1925 and 1937 respectively.[3] The Kemalists did not only target religious notables; in particular they assaulted secular Kurdish leaders because they could not be co-opted by appealing to Islamic brotherhood. In the post-war era, both politicians who operated within the legal boundaries of the Turkish nation state like Mehdi Zana, as well as commanders and leaders of insurgency movements like Abdullah Öcalan were targeted and imprisoned. In the 1990s, the Turkish government's paramilitary death squads pursued prominent Kurdish businessmen, writers, and journalists, kidnapping and killing them in an effort to destroy the intelligentsia of the pro-Kurdish movement.[4]

The massacres following the 1925 Sheikh Said uprising stand as a good example of the Kemalist-era massacres.[5] In a country-wide circular of 25 February 1925, the government had already promised "severe measures" against the insurgents, though repeatedly declaring the local population to be essentially "naive, innocent, and patriotic".[6] The counter-insurgency warfare that followed after the reconquest of Diyarbekir province was total: villages were torched, civilians as well as combatants summarily executed. The killings followed the methods of the destruction of the Armenians, a decade earlier in the same region. Upon invading a village, the villagers were routinely disarmed, stripped of their belongings (including gold teeth), and collectively tied by their hands with rope. They were then taken to trenches and cliffs, where they were executed with machine guns. Another method was cramming people into haylofts and sheds and setting fire to the buildings, burning the people alive.[7] For example, the Turkish army targeted the Zirkî tribe of Lice for supporting Sheikh Said, and their villages (Bamitnî, Barsum, Zara, Matbur and Çaylarbaşı) were destroyed and the inhabitants murdered. The tribe's large mansion and cemetery were levelled, and all livestock was seized, slaughtered, and cooked as provisions for the soldiers. According to survivors, the same units that had destroyed the town's Armenian population a decade earlier, had been sent to the Kurdish villages with similar instructions. This unit was known among the population as the "butcher battalion" (*kasap taburu*).[8] The attack on certain tribes announced that the killings targeted certain categories associated with the enemy: according to official reports, in the Lice district they "had annihilated most of the sheikhs".[9]

In the north-western districts of Hani, Piran (later renamed Dicle), Palu, and Ergani, Major Ali Barut commanded the army units. Ali Barut became infamous for robbing his victims before killing them. In his districts, too, indiscriminate massacres were committed. In the Palu district, they invaded the village of Gülüşkür and robbed all the houses of their movable property, including cattle. One group of soldiers lashed together and murdered the inhabitants with bayonets, whereas another group burnt the village to the ground. In Erdürük, a large village of more than 100 households, a total of 200 people were crammed into a large stable and burnt alive. According to survivors, the nauseating smell of burnt human flesh lingered in the village for days. Even villages that had never joined Sheikh Said but stayed loyal to the government suffered the same fate. The villagers of Karaman, for example, welcomed the Turkish army with water and buttermilk, but its population was nevertheless massacred and its property seized.[10] As a result of this campaign of carnage, panic and disbelief spread throughout the countryside of northern Diyarbekir. People fled into the hills, caves, and mountain valleys to reach safety, in vain, because army units pursued them into these remote sites as well. According to official army reports, while hunting down a group of survivors on Çotela, a mountain just north of Pasur/Kulp, army units had slaughtered 450 people and burnt 60 villages, rendering the mountain bare of settlement.[11]

Precise data is lacking, but according to one account, during the 1925 massacres, altogether 206 villages were destroyed, 8,758 houses burnt, and 15,200 people killed. During the 1930 massacres in the Ararat area, the army destroyed 220 villages and killed an estimated 10,000 people. Finally, in the 1938 Dersim massacre, possibly 15,000 civilians were killed by the Turkish army and gendarmerie, with widespread destruction to the habitat of the locals.[12] These figures cannot be verified definitively without access to the Turkish military and security archives.

The 1938 Dersim genocide

On 8 December 1936, veteran CUP deportation boss and Interior Minister Şükrü Kaya (1883–1959) convened a conference of all four general inspectorates[13] in Ankara with the aim of evaluating the progress of the regime's governance of the eastern provinces. The conference, chaired by Kaya, featured First Inspector-General Abidin Özmen, Second Inspector-General General Kâzım Dirik, Third Inspector-General Tahsin Uzer, Fourth Inspector-General Abdullah Alpdoğan, and gendarme commanders Naci Tınaz and Seyfi Düzgören. This arrangement of persons at the conference clearly showed that veteran social engineers of the CUP were in charge of ruling eastern Turkey. Over three long days, the inspectors briefed Kaya on how nation-building was proceeding in their districts.[14] Each of the inspectors presented their reports on their own province, promising that the government's measures would obviate the ethnic questions in their areas. The speakers identified Kurds, Armenians, Syriacs, and Yezidis living in Syria as wreckers, who were "working for the establishment of a greater Armenia and unified Kurdistan". Ethnic minority claims were to be prevented by more gendarme presence in the countryside and a continued deportation and settlement programme. Both Alpdoğan and Özmen also argued that simply continuing the physical removal of people would not solve the Kurdish question durably. In their opinion, long-lasting solutions necessitated propaganda and sustained efforts for forced assimilation, such as linguistic and cultural assaults on the Kurds' identity.[15]

In the course of 1937, a radicalization developed in Kemalist policies. On 4 June 1937, the same Şükrü Kaya sent the Ministry of Culture a top-secret circular about establishing Turkish-language boarding schools in Kurdish areas:

> Boarding schools for girls and boys need to be opened and girls and boys from the age of five need to be brought into these schools for education and upbringing. These boys and girls need to be married to each other and settled dispersedly on property inherited from their parents where they can establish a Turkish Nest so that Turkish Culture can be thoroughly implanted [in the region […] Therefore […] it is necessary and essential that small children be placed in this type of boarding schools.[16]

According to Kaya, girls in particular needed to be placed in the schools since mothers were seen as the carriers of the Kurdish culture that needed to be exorcised from their minds. This order had come from Atatürk himself, who had expressed determination to pursue a policy leaving no place for mothers to raise their children with languages other than Turkish. The aim was to drive a cultural wedge between generations in order for Kurds to become "future Turks". The road to the nation was as coercive as it was gendered: women were seen as carriers of national reproductivity, vessels of national identity, and transmitters of culture. The boarding school represented the Kemalist belief that the school's capacity to accomplish the transformation from "savage Kurds" to "civilized Turks" would determine the long-term fate of the Kurds, for if the doctrine of historical progress and the story of Turkish civilization taught anything, it was the incompatibility of "Turkish civilization" and "Kurdish savagism". The assault on cultural

identity was not seen as a racist and colonial practice but as a mission civilisatrice. As such, these policies were not unlike those of the American, Canadian, or Australian governments towards the indigenous peoples (and especially children) of those continents.

Overall, the reaction of the Dersim area to these policies was mixed: whereas some families accepted the new social contract, moved to the cities, and became culturally Turkish, others refused and rejected it. The 1937 Dersim "uprising", much like the 1925 one, was a reaction to these Kemalist policies. The Kemalist counter-reaction then was singularly brutal and possibly the most violent episode of mass murder in the modern history of the Turkish Republic. This period of genocide against Kurds is well documented in terms of its preparation, coordination, societal atmosphere, and ideological justification. Turkish-nationalist social engineers openly called for the deportation and destruction of Kurds, especially in Dersim. Mustafa Kemal personally took the lead in defining the population politics and demographic engineering in this period, assigning his lieutenants to follow a ruthless anti-Kurdish policy of subjugation, deportation, assimilation, and if necessary, elimination. His chief assistant, Interior Minister Şükrü Kaya, consistently called for the comprehensive ethnic and cultural homogenization of the country, both in parliamentary addresses and confidential reports.[17]

The character of the massacres has not been studied in detail due to the lack of access to sources from the perpetrators' perspective. Yet a recent archival discovery has shed some light on this dimension of the killing. A Turkish soldier named Yusuf Kenan Akım kept a diary when he was serving in the army and his unit was ordered to 'clean out' (*temizlemek*) villages in Dersim. His diary entries of 1938 offer a unique insight into the day-to-day perpetration of massacres:

> *13 August*: Today our unit captured 20,000 sheep and 50 Kurds in a valley.
>
> *9 September*: Ah, how I wish I was in İzmir. But we are on some mountain grappling with the Kurds [...] Today we arrived in the valley after combing (*tarayarak*) the mountains and forests. Our unit brought the head of the chieftain of the Şam Uşak tribe Şeytan Ali, and killed and brought the heads of many more people. Now our unit became a favorite, all officers call us the unit of heroes. Ali Galip Paşa told us on the phone that he kisses our eyes. We spent the night an hour away from Ovacık. We are very tired again.
>
> *10 September*: all mountains and forests have been combed. Our unit brought the head of one of the notorious ones. Another unit brought the head of Seyithan. There is a soldier named Ruşen in our unit. He is cutting off all the heads.[18]

The few perpetrator accounts at hand corroborate the eyewitness testimonies of survivors, who recounted in rich detail the massacres, the aerial bombings with confirmed use of poisonous gas, the sexual violence, the mass deportations, and the subsequent policies of cultural genocide.[19]

The "1990s": a new phase of Turkish state violence

The 1990s was a second major period of mass violence against Kurdish civilians. In the conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which became an armed conflict in 1984, Turkish paramilitary units and death squads committed extensive violence against civilians, especially in the 1990s. They were involved in counter-insurgency operations against the PKK, including assassinations, forced disappearances, torture, sexual violence,

material and environmental destruction, and several important massacres of civilians.[20] The massacres of Cizre (1992) and Lice (1993), in which Turkish army forces rampaged through these towns, shelling indiscriminately and shooting at anyone in the streets, left many dozens dead and depopulated entire areas. From 1992 on, the army began 'evacuating' villages in order to cut off the civilian support to the PKK, thereby burning 3,000 Kurdish villages and displacing over three million villagers.[21] The violence not only took place in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, but also targeted Kurds all over: in the western parts of Turkey, government death squads kidnapped and assassinated specific categories of Kurds: journalists, businessmen, politicians, and the like. The Turkish state's violence in the 1990s was truly a watershed in the history of the Kurds. There are various characteristics that distinguish this period from other periods of the Republic, even the most violent periods.[22] With a history of rebellions and resistance led by different political groups with different leaders, the political and sometimes violent struggle of Kurds had been a recurrent feature in the history of the Republic prior to the 1980s and the subsequent war between the PKK and the Turkish state. One of the characteristics of the 1990s that sets it apart from the longer period of conflict was the intensity of violence carried out by the state.[23]

The Turkish state's political violence of the 1990s was importantly a result of the experience the state had gained from violence enacted in previous periods and stands as a reference point for violence enacted in particular in 2015–2016. The years of the 1990s were the most intensely violent decade of a hundred-year history of state violence in northern Kurdistan. It was about the state's new military and political strategy, which it started to implement from the early 1990s.[24] This strategy of violence acted by the state has been named differently. Authors, army, and guerrilla commanders have conceptualized the strategic transformation that occurred at the beginning of the early 1990s in various ways:[25] Former Turkish commander Kundakçı called it 'the 1993 Strategy',[26] Turkish Lieutenant General Altay Tokat defined the strategy as "Low Intensity Conflict" and "field domination",[27] Metin Gürcan, a former soldier in the Turkish army, used the name "Doctrine of Areal Control".[28] On the other side, Murat Karayılan, a PKK leader, called the strategy that state used against them "Total War".[29]

A few key features of the 1990s violence were: Kurdish civilians were massively targeted. The methods of violence perpetrated by the state's official and informal security forces were mainly unsolved murders, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and the burning of villages.[30] Furthermore, next to official armed forces of the state, some of the semi-formal and informal paramilitary armed groups used particularly against Kurdish civilians during the 1990s intense violence as death squads and auxiliary forces.[31] These types of violence were also implemented in the late Ottoman and the Republican periods. But for about a decade, the 1990s, these forms of violence were quite intensely practised against civilians.

In this decade, the most frequent form of violence against civilians was unsolved murders. A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report argues that the Turkish government began using a new counterinsurgency strategy against the PKK in 1992 in which the paramilitaries (particularly the village guards) played a major role.[32] Reports prepared in the mid-1990s by the TBMM (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*; Turkish Grand National Assembly) also referred to the JİTEM and counter-guerrilla organization (the Special Warfare Department) as responsible for the unsolved murders in the 1990s.[33] Table 3.1 below demonstrates the dramatic increase in unsolved murders and extrajudicial executions in the 1990s.[34]

Enforced disappearances, which is another form of violence against civilians, was massively applied in 1990 for the first time in the history of modern Turkey. Enforced disappearance by a state's security forces or groups linked with the state is one of the most extreme types of violence against an individual considered to threaten a regime.[35] Therefore, leaving a person

Table 3.1 Unsolved political murders and extrajudicial executions (by year)

1980–1990	*1991–2000*	*2001–2011*	*Total*
103	3285	228	3566

Table 3.2 The numbers of disappeared (by year)

1980–1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*After 2000*	*Date Unknown*
33	18	22	103	518	232	170	94	50	76	33	4

without a grave creates a serious break in the cultural continuity of individuals and society.[36] Moreover, the lack of a grave distinguishes enforced disappearances from extrajudicial executions and unsolved killings. The enforced disappearance of dissidents by the state or its affiliated groups not only end their lives but also serve as intimidation and punishment to all the social and political society to which they belong. Table 3.2 above demonstrates how this method of violence has peaked with the new strategy the state has begun to implement and how it declined in the late 1990s.[37]

Another form of violence was the forced displacement of people living in rural areas as a result of the burning or evacuation of villages in northern Kurdistan. When PKK started the war against the Turkish state, the state established a village guard system to control the rural area and gather intelligence.[38] Accordingly, The state forced many peasants in the rural area to become village guards. Many villages that did not accept the village guards were evacuated and burned.[39] The Turkish state carried out different methods in terms of its new war strategy at the same time: the first was to spread the village guard to control the countryside, the second was to empty the population that supported the PKK and did not accept be village guard from the countryside, and the last was to burn or evacuate villages to emigrate the "disloyal to the state" population. The authorities gave civilians in the countryside "two options": either to stay and become village guards or to leave.[40] These options comprised the choice between loyalty and hostility to the state. TİHV reported that in 1997, 3,500 villages and hamlets had been evacuated and approximately three million people had been forced to emigrate.[41]

Alevis were another target of Turkish state violence (particularly through Turkish nationalist masses, extreme right militias, and vigilantes), specifically in the late 1970s. In 1934 and 1955, the Thrace and Istanbul pogroms, respectively, were state-sponsored attacks against non-Muslim populations to create a homogeneous Turkish nation during the post-Republican period.[42]

The purpose of the Turkish state elites was the construction of a new homogeneous nation, both religious (Sunni Muslim) and ethnic (Turkish). Therefore, in the 1990s, state violence targeted Alevis as well as Kurdish civilians in northern Kurdistan. The first Alevi massacre in the 1990s occurred when an Islamic extremist mob attacked a festival organized by an Alevi association in Sivas on 2 July 1993 and burned down the hotel where the festival was held, killing 35 people. State security forces did not prevent the massacre. The second massacre occurred on 12 March 1995 in the Gazi neighbourhood in Istanbul, where mostly Alevi Kurds lived, after a protest that started as a result of an attack by unknown people with weapons against coffeehouses. There were mass protests that lasted several days in Istanbul due to the

attack against Alevi people. State security forces attacked the protesters in Gazi and other Alevi neighbourhoods, killing 20 people in total. Gazi was an Istanbul neighbourhood where the methods of violence used in northern Kurdistan were tried during the entire decade.[43]

Old habits, new methods: urban destruction in 2015–2016

State violence against Kurds is an old habit, as old as the Ottoman centralization policy and the establishment of the new Turkish nation state. The destruction of prominent Kurdish cities by state forces during the 2015–2016 conflict was a new phase in the use of violence. But, the destroying of the Kurds' settlements is not a new type of political violence. Kurdish villages were burned and destroyed during the Koçgiri (1921), Sheikh Said (1925), and Ağrı (1930) rebellions and the Dersim genocide (1938) just before and after the establishment of the Republic.[44] As mentioned above, in the 1990s, thousands of villages were burned and evacuated, and this destruction was one of the most obvious methods of state violence in the 1990s. However, the destroying of urban centres was a new stage and method of violence implemented by the state. Similar but low-level urban destruction had been caused by the use of heavy weapons by state forces during the conflicts in Şırnak during the 1992 Newroz festival and in Lice in October 1993.[45]

In the Turkish state tradition, which is claimed to have a democratic political system, it is state policy to deny political differences, social problems, and eliminate the opposition that puts on the agenda these issues, and also the method for 'solving' these problems has generally been armed violence. For more than 40 years, conflicts have been going on between the Turkish state and the PKK, and ceasefires and negotiations have been undertaken several times since 1993. The most effective negotiation period was the peace talks between 2013 and 2015.[46] However, while peace talks between the PKK's leader, Öcalan, and state officials continue, the Turkish state has built an enormous military base in Kurdistan, constructing new prisons and many new outposts in rural areas. These newly built military stations are called in Turkish *Kalekol*, which means an outpost like a castle. There were even protests and small-scale conflicts to prevent the construction of these military stations during the peace process.[47]

In the fall of 2014, before the peace process concluded, some newspapers reported that the government had adopted a plan prepared by the Turkish army aimed at eliminating the PKK and its supporters. The name of this strategy, which was discussed in the press, is claimed to be an Implosion Plan (Çöktürme Planı), and it is stated that it aims at a total military annihilation, as in the case of Sri Lanka.[48] The Sri Lanka case refers to the elimination of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which defended the Tamil community against the government, as well as the killing of many civilians.[49] The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) MP Alican Önlü also asked the government about the plan, but did not get any answers.[50] However, in the summer of 2015, at a time when many people hoped "this time there will be peace", the war resumed with all its violence.[51]

These war preparations by the Turkish state during the peace process have caused intense conflict and urban destruction since July 2015. Turkish authorities began operations in more than 30 urban and a number of rural locations from July 2015 on the grounds that Kurdish youths had set up barricades and were digging trenches in cities during the peace process. According to the UN report on the conflict and urban destruction in 2015–2016, between 355,000 and 500,000 Kurdish people were forcibly displaced in these military operations by security forces. It says more than 2,000 people have died in the conflicts, including 800 Turkish security forces, 1,200 Kurdish people, and it is not clear how many of them are civilians and how many are armed youths. During these operations, curfews were imposed for weeks, sometimes months.[52]

It is also stated in the report that Turkish air and ground forces used heavy weapons in these military operations to bomb and destroy settlements and that these demolitions are also seen in satellite images. The cities that experienced the most deaths during the military operations and where the most destruction occurred were as follows: Cizre (province of Şırnak); Sur, Silvan, and Lice (province of Diyarbakır); Nusaybin and Dargeçit (province of Mardin); Şırnak Centre and Silopi, Idil (province of Şırnak); and Yüksekova (province of Hakkari).[53]

As is also evident from the testimonies of those who were there during the operations, government agencies re-recruited and used many paramilitaries which had experience in the 1990s conflicts (Interview, conducted in Cologne, 13 February 2017). Like the 1990s, paramilitary groups were used in these military operations with heightened capacities, operating under formal military forces. Among the names used for the teams that participated in the 2015 conflicts were "JİTEM" and "Esedullah" (Lion of Allah).[54] JİTEM (Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele/Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Organisation) was one of the most active death squads during the 1990s conflict in northern Kurdistan.[55]

The Turkish state's use of violence has intensified in northern Kurdistan, particularly in post-2015 cities. The destruction of the towns demonstrates that state violence has moved to a different stage in terms of social problems and relations with the opposition. It could be argued that those military operations aimed at re-establishing the Turkish state's sovereignty in Northern Kurdistan. As a result, those methods of annihilation illustrate that the state authorities aim to re-establish the sovereignty of the state through violent methods, not to resolve the Kurdish issue through the peace talks. The method adopted by the Turkish authorities for this is the same as in the case of Sri Lanka: total destruction.

Conclusion

All in all, these three distinct periods of violence had in common that they were functions of the Turkish nation state's imposition of homogeneity on its society by targeting Kurdish civilians, either individually or collectively. The impact of this violence was existential for the Kurds. In the popular imagination and media representation, victimization became an intrinsic element of Kurdish identity. Without a Kurdish census, however, we do not even know the total number of Kurds who died (or even currently live) in the region. Similarly we do not have reliable figures on the death counts: the Dersim genocide has been estimated as anywhere between 12,000 and 40,000; the 1990s has slightly better statistics, but thousands are unaccounted for, and without proper research on mass graves and state archives, we do not possess any definitive numbers.[56] Significant research has been conducted on the psychological, societal, and cultural trauma that these violent episodes have inflicted on Kurdish society in Turkey. Turkification sowed the seeds of violent contestation, as the Kurdish response to victimization was along the spectrum of fright, flight, and fight – the latter symbolized by the rise of Kurdish-nationalist and socialist political parties (such as the PKK), as well as intercommunal conflict in the Kurdish region.

This chapter has argued that these three distinct violent phases might have been episodic, but also that much of the logic of this violence was systemic. It emanated from specific ideological precepts (nationalism) and security doctrines (preventing cross-border Kurdish unity), as well as significant continuities in practice and cadre. It is unlikely that without the precedent and legacy of Kemalist violence, the 1990s would have been as violent as they were. The institutional and cultural memory of the Turkish army was passed on from one generation to another, and whether it was Sheikh Said's movement or the PKK, the southeast of the country was continuously seen as a soft underbelly of the nation state. The consequence for different

generations of Kurdish civilians was victimization and trauma, which reverberates into the twenty-first century.

Notes

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3 Üngör, ibid., 122–166.
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7 Zinar Silopi, *Doza Kürdistan. Kürt Milletini 60 Sendeneberi Esaretten Kurtuluş Savaşı Hatıratı* (Ankara: Özge Yayınları, 2001), 92.
8 Interview with Nihat Işık conducted by Şeyhmus Diken, published in: Şeyhmus Diken, *İsyan Sürgünleri* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005), 259–261.
9 *Genelkurmay Belgelerinde Kürt İsyanları: I* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2012), 313.
10 Ahmet Kahraman, *Kürt Isyanları: Tedip Ve Tenkil* (Istanbul: Evrensel Basım Yayın, 2003), 165–176.
11 Ibid., p.170.
12 Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, 107–169.
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